RECONSTRUCTING THE BODIES:

BETWEEN THE POLITICS OF ORDER AND THE POLITICS OF DISORDER (2018)

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In order to overcome the post-political condition—which in the realm of politics blurs differences between the left and right political parties and, in the realm of art, differences between art and commodity, leaving us without choice—some thinkers envisaged alternative political projects to neoliberalism. Jacques Rancière envisaged the model of communal anarchism; a politics of disorder and dissensus, without any type of mastery. Chantal Mouffe envisaged the model of agonistic pluralism; a politics of order and conflictual consensus, regulated by hegemony and decisional acts. After drawing a distinction between Rancière's and Mouffe's theories, I will observe their different consequences for envisaging the relationship between art and politics. To begin with, I will draw attention to Peter Bürger's survey of the mutual conditionality of bourgeois art and the vanguard movements in art. This observation will enable a distinction between the artistic strategies of rupture and the artistic strategies of engagement, pointing at the different consequences that they have on conceiving the political dimension of art. Finally, I will show that from the point of view of the artistic strategies of engagement, the relationship between the abject and intelligible bodies is a matter of decision, that enables a move beyond class-, gender-, or race- based identities, towards the relational forms of identifications.

To perceive the body with regard to agonism and acts of decision, is to acknowledge, drawing upon Judith Butler, that the body is not constructed in an oppositional relation between the

intelligible and the abject body.1 For if a relationship of opposition aims at homogenizing differential poles, it sustains intelligibility and leaves no possibility for a choice. On the contrary, it could be suggested that the body is constructed in a dialectic that entails a paradoxical relation between the intelligible body and the abject body. This approach explains that the abject body is a paradoxically different, an excluded body, the limit of possibility and, yet, a condition of the intelligible body. The abject body is thus a constitutive outside to the intelligible body; it ruptures the intelligible and opens up possibilities for modes of life that have no intelligible place. This view suggests that the body is constructed at the point of intersection of intelligible and abject bodies. Insofar as the paradoxical bond between the differential bodies compels us to acknowledge their inherently conflictual relation it, at once, compels us to think of their mutual conditionality that manifests through decisive acts. Given these points, precisely the paradoxical relations and contingent acts of decision confront Butler's assertion that gender may not be challenged by decision.2

DISORDER AND ORDER: RANCIÈRE AND MOUFFE

When examining the relation between art and politics, contemporary performance scholars mainly draw upon Rancière's and Mouffe's political projects of democracy. Rancière and Mouffe share a view on democracy up to a point. Closely related are their emphases on language, power, disagreement, conflict, struggle and the collective aspect of democracy. What Rancière defines in terms of disagreement and power and what Mouffe defines in terms of antagonism and hegemony, are constitutive of the social realm. Nevertheless, whereas for Rancière the democratic principle of the power of everybody (that he situates within the realm of politics), may exist autonomously from the representation absorbed by the principle of the

State (which presents the order of the police), for Mouffe there is no power of the popular will (located within the realm of the political) without the moment of representation which functions as the hegemonic principle of the State (designated in terms of politics). For Mouffe, politics is a condition and a vehicle for the power of popular will, of those who Rancière defines in terms of "those who have no part." With regard to Mouffe's project of democracy, the political becomes constructed at the point of intersection of the popular will and the state. Rancière's and Mouffe's perspectives on democracy differ precisely at this point. While Rancière's distinction between the principle of democracy and the principle of the state forecloses the possibility of politics to engage with the police order, the reciprocal relationship between democracy and the state, suggested by Mouffe, allows for an engagement with existing politics. Their different proposals of democracy require a much more nuanced explanation, before we can observe their different consequences on art.

1. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* Rancière explained that domination and servitude, whose objective is to impose one meaning and to establish a single reality, are part of the ontological distribution.3 To that effect, Rancière dismisses the engagement with the state as an ontological foundation of domination and hierarchy and, instead, advocates an egalitarian, contingent, and anarchistic politics, a politics of "disorder," without mastery and without any type of consensus. At this point, Bram Ieven observes how for Rancière politics and ontology are mutually exclusive.4 What, in fact, Rancière suggests is that an ontological distribution historicized the forms of visibility, which presuppose equality, into dogmatic regimes of perception and ineligibility, into a representative regime. Then, to disagree with the representative regime that dogmatized forms of visibility is to dehistoricize it, by putting in action a presupposed equality between different systems of perception and ineligibility; it is to activate egalitarianism. This endeavor demands the activation of the transcendental moments of disagreement within the

ontologically established dogmatic regimes of perception and ineligibility in a form of a rupture; in a form of an event which breaks it and undoes it into a plurality of positions that persist in clash rather than being retained by the ontologically reductionist practices. The goal becomes to create a system in which one regime does not abolish another, but rather in which "several regimes coexist and intermingle."[5] The consequence of this tactic is the constitution of a politics of "disorder;" the politics without mastery and without any type of consensus—in one word, the politics of dissensus.

As can be seen, Rancière avoids the principle of the state being identified with the ontological foundation of domination and the logic of representation that lead to oligarchy. In contrast, he advocates that power cannot be institutionalized, but only practiced.[6] Such a view of power suggests a non-oligarchic approach to societies. To clarify this view, in *Introducing Disagreement*, Rancière first emphasized language as a common anthropological property which allows everyone to participate in common affairs. One of the significant characteristics of language is that it assumes disagreement, a quarrel, raised by those who are excluded from the common affairs over that which is symbolized as common. And, precisely those who are excluded stand for a surplus to social groups, that is, political subjects as supernumerary collectives which initiate a quarrel and disrupt the common which he defines as "the counting of community's parts and the relations of inclusion and exclusion which define that count."[7] Rancière names the way of counting community's parts the police, and the moments of disruption of that count by the uncounted politics. Accordingly, the role of politics becomes to disrupt the hierarchical divisions between counted and uncounted, common and partial, or visible and invisible, regulated by the order of police. This is how politics stage within the realm of police that which was uncounted and excluded, by disrupting the ensemble of its counted

"parts, places and functions." In this context, Rancière writes that "democracy is the disrupting of all logics that purport to found domination on some entitlement to dominate."[8]

By explaining that disagreement, or quarrel, is constitutive of politics and that it may disrupt the order of hierarchy regulated by police, Rancière explained a conflictual and dissensual potential of politics. However, what he left unclear is how a disagreement, that raises from the order of politics, may engage with the police so that it challenges the existing regime of representation and hence, invigorates democracy. In fact, we are not sure how a conflict between politics and the police may be rearticulated once politics disrupts the police order and stages itself within it. In other words, Rancière's egalitarian political project does not really allow those who disagree, "who have no part," to engage with the police and transform it by breaking networks it established. It rather aims to dismiss it as the consequence of the ontological distribution of power and servitude and establish anarchism. This approach entices us to envisage Rancière's politics as the politics of withdrawal from the police, from "the forces of law and order,"[9] rather than as the politics of engagement with it.

Rancière's perspective on politics has been criticized from different points of view. Political and media scholar Jodi Dean addressed Rancière's critic of law. Dean warns that Rancière's critic of the spread of law as the main cause of depoliticization—of the post-political condition we live in—serves a neoliberal argument against governmental oversight and an argument for privatization. Pointing at the collapse of regulations in the financial sector, the importance of forms of public/private partnerships, and necessity of private surveillance for precluding terrorism, she writes that Rancière's dismissal of law, administration, and expertise:

*cannot serve as a basis for a critique of the neoliberal state's abolition of oversight and neglect of basic governance […] it is also incompatible with the acknowledgement of the widespread scepticism toward science and expertise and the concomitant cultivation and embrace of amateur, ordinary, and common opinion.*10

Drawing upon philosopher Slavoj Žižek, Dean describes this attitude as a decline in symbolic efficiency. The order of law, she reminds us, still may protect certain liberties in common or public spaces.11 For his part, philosopher Alain Badiou stresses that a perspective on politics without order refuses to acknowledge that every political process is an organized process of militants against the hegemony of the parliamentary state; otherwise there are no militants and no hegemony to disagree with.12 Once this is acknowledged, it becomes apparent that the anarchistic perspective on societies fails to recognize that the demands of the militants, of those who are uncounted and who disagree with the system, will not be heard without representatives in the parliament who might defend them.13

Another problem in Rancière's argument stands in relation to his assertion that forms of power although ever-present, do not always imply politics. He writes that "politic occurs only when political subjects initiate a quarrel over the perceptible givens of common life."14 A similar assertion by Rancière led political scholar Paulina Tambakaki to define his concept of politics as episodic, introducing doubt that politics as such may appear at all.15 Accordingly she writes: "while democracy has succumbed to the consensus system, the dissensual politics which could perhaps revitalise it is not there, and more importantly, it might never be there."16 By these means Tambakaki explains that by ascribing a rarity to politics, Rancière cancelled out a radical potential of dissensus he previously introduced. What in fact Tambakaki shows is that

Rancière's impossibility of explaining the ineradicability of conflict and its staging within the police order falls into the trap of arbitrariness.[17]

2. In contrast to Rancière, Mouffe's different concept of democracy, which introduces the moment of the political and inscribes it at the level of the ontological, opens up a possibility for understanding how disagreement and conflict may be domesticated and how they may invigorate a dynamic democratic politics through the strategies of engagement.

As we have observed, by doing away with the state as an ontological foundation of domination and hierarchy, that is with the forces of law and order, Rancière suggests that the "harmonious" society is possible. Mouffe's position is overtly different. She situates disagreement at the level of the political, acknowledging its ontological dimension. For Mouffe the ontological "concerns the very way in which society is symbolically instituted."[18] This means that every social relation—our realities and identities—is meaningful and constructed through the processes of symbolization. On the one hand, symbolization implies the constitution of the symbolized; on the other hand, it implies the exclusion of that which escapes symbolization. The excluded is constitutive to the symbolized, yet paradoxically different from it. As its constitutive outside and its condition of possibility, the excluded struggles to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy by threatening the symbolized; as its paradoxically different, it precludes a possibility of a reconciliation with the symbolized. The indispensable phase of exchange between the symbolized and its paradoxically different pole, explains that the process of symbolization entails an ever-present disagreement, or, to use Mouffe's term, an ever-present conflict. Accordingly, symbolization entails that all social practices are given through the system of hegemonic relations in the form of conflict between the symbolized and its

constitutive outside. In this regard, conflict appears to be inherent to the social realm and, thus, resides at the level of the ontological. This is to say that conflicts are ineradicable from societies and that the politics—an ensemble of hegemonic discourses, practices, and institutions—is always threatened by its exteriority.

In this context, Mouffe observed the social realm in terms of "politics" and "the political." Borrowing Heidegger's vocabulary, she explains that "the political" refers to the ontological level, while "politics" refer to the ontic level. In *On the Political* she writes:

by "the political" I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by "politics" I refer to the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organising human coexistence in the context of conflicts provided by the political.[19]

Perceived in relation to Mouffe's the political/politics configuration of societies, we may say that the operation of symbolization implies conflict in terms of an antagonism. Accordingly, antagonism is situated at the level of the (onto)political which continuously disrupts and disarticulates politics constituted of institutions and practices that aim at regulating social order. Nevertheless, politics stands for a proximal solution for the antagonistic relations; the order of politics rearticulates antagonistic relations into agonistic configurations, into—what Mouffe calls—a "conflictual consensus" that, in fact, may never overcome conflictual relations between paradoxically differential positions.[20] This means that agonism is always traversed by antagonism. Seen within this framework, "politics" refers to the level of the ontic.

Therefore, in contrast to Rancière's egalitarian politico-philosophical approach, Mouffe's ontic-ontological theoretical trajectory suggests that the social realm is not constituted simply of the plurality of different and paradoxical associations—be it ethical, gender, or cultural—that emerge outside the state on the level of the political and that disrupt law and order regulated by institutions. Rather, it stresses that different associations of people always require an order established on an ontic level, on the level of the state. From this we understand that the role of the state is to provide a temporary and proximal unity for the multiplicity of demands advocated by differential associations. As a pragmatist thinker Dewey indicated, back in 1927, "the state is the organization of the public effected through officials for the protection of the interests shared by its members."[21] As long as certain interests have particular consequences upon the other, upon those who are not directly engaged in them, the state has to regulate those consequences. This is so because, as Dewey pointed out, "regulation cannot be effected by the primary groupings themselves."[22] The significance of Dewey's assertion lies in abandoning the belief that anarchism might relegate all the evils and construct a "voluntary fraternal organization."[23]

This view suggests that the role of the state within the liberal democratic society becomes to regulate relations between differential association of the people. As Mouffe explains, what is important for the politics, for the set of institutions and practices organized on the level of the state, is "that conflict does not take the form of an 'antagonism' (struggle between enemies) but the form of an 'agonism' (struggle between adversaries)."[24] However, since the constitution of agonistic relations brings proximity to antagonistic conflictual situations, rather than an absolute resolution of them, the possibility of antagonism never perishes. This is in line with Dewey's thought that the state has to be remade, "as soon as its form is stabilized."[25] Only by means of remaking or reconstructing may the state domesticate demands advocated by different

associations (people of color, women, LGBTQIA, immigrants, poor, workers…). Such a view on the state, by extension, implies that every order is a contingent and temporary hegemonic order, threatened by the excluded and subject to change. In other words, a hegemonic order appears as a condition for counter-hegemony which does not only rupture the established institutions, but continuously engages with them, aiming to rearticulate law and order in alternative ways. Given these points, we can conclude that Mouffe's politics of agonism does not start with the strategies of withdrawal from the state and does not opt for disorder; it rather begins with the mobilization of the people to engage with the state and establish an alternative order.

One point must be stressed here: a significant characteristic of hegemony manifests in the moments of decision. They are signalled in the indispensable phase of drawing the limits that the continuous processes of exclusion imply. In the plural field of choices, decisions have to be made so that a particular symbolic order becomes instituted and a particular unity proposed in a name.26 Since they are always taken at the detriment of another choice, decisions point at the aspect of undecidability within the act of deciding. Undecidability entails the presence of paradoxically different choices as plural, coexisting, and relational positions. For this reason, each decisional act constitutes a proximal solution for the ongoing disagreement, a temporary stabilization of antagonism, and an institutionalization of the hegemony of one of several possible choices. In fact, a choice that is made stands for a particular symbolic delimitation and articulation of equality (of choices) and liberty (to choose) that render democratic principles. In this context, what remains outside an established order, for its part, continuously challenges and disrupts the symbolic hegemony (the chosen) aiming to establish an alternative one. By these means, the excluded assumes an aspect of an ever-present possibility of conflict within the symbolized, and an ever-present potentiality to radicalize and rearticulate the symbolically

instituted order from within. We can see from this how, on the one hand, Mouffe's model of agonistic democracy identifies an ever-persisting possibility of conflict within the social realm; a conflict between different plural, equally compelling choices, that persist in a struggle for hegemony. It is in this sense that agonism does not entail a sudden and an episodic event, nor arbitrariness. On the other hand, Mouffe's agonistic model of democracy implies a possibility of constituting a counter-order, a counter-hegemonic order as a result of alternative decisional acts. This move implies that processes of constructing the people are precarious and that the state has always to be reinvented on the level of the symbolic.

Rupture and Engagement: The Case of Vanguard Movements in Art

What are the consequences of the agonistic model of democracy for the understanding of the political dimension of artistic practices, and their possibility of contesting dominant politics and contributing to their reconstitution in alternative ways? How may art contribute to the construction of people? In order to offer a possible answer to these questions, I will begin with the observation of the relationship between bourgeois art and avant-garde art, drawing upon a literary critic and art scholar Peter Bürger. In his landmark work *Theory of the Avant-Garde* Bürger discussed why the avant-garde movements failed to challenge and displace bourgeois art. The insight into his theory shows why, rather than the artistic strategies of rupture that are suggested by Rancière's theory, the artistic strategies of engagement that we have located in Mouffe's theory play an important role in challenging dominant systems of representation in art and in politics. By extension, the artistic strategies of engagement will enable a particular

view on the way politics and art may challenge the existing neoliberal bodies and contribute to the reconstruction of the bodies in different ways.

To begin with, let us take a brief look at twentieth-century art. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the break with the disciplinary strictures of modernity led to a renunciation of the autonomous and apolitical character of art precisely by connecting aesthetics to the political. The avant-garde movements opposed the dominant institution of art (artistic and curatorial practices, museology, representations, techniques…) in an attempt to create society anew, in which art and politics would not exist anymore as separate entities. Bürger observed this move on the European avant-garde scene in terms of an attack on bourgeois art seen as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of people.27 By drawing a distinction between sacral art of the High Middle Ages and courtly art at the court of Louis XIV on the one hand, and bourgeois art characteristic for modernism on the other hand, Bürger demonstrated how collective production and reception of art were gradually transformed in such a way so that they became a matter of the individual production and individual reception of art. He explained that cult objects of sacral art and objects of sociability of courtly art have been gradually replaced in the nineteenth century with "the objectification of the self-understanding of the bourgeois class."28 With the appearance of the bourgeois class, the production and reception of self-understanding, as it was articulated in art, ceased to be tied to the praxis of life. On this point, Bürger suggested that the avant-garde movements stand for an attack, not on the bourgeois forms of art, but on art as institution detached from the praxis of life.29 This is why the avant-garde has been considered as a demand for the return of art to its social function, to its specific use connected to the praxis of life. Moreover, Bürger suggests that the return to the pragmatic role of art advocated by the avant-garde movements was not sought on the level of content, but on the level of aesthetics. Accordingly, he wrote that the avant-gardists "assent to the

aestheticists' rejection of the world and its means-ends rationality."[30] This means that the avant-gardists did not undertake a task to integrate art into the existing praxis, but "to organise a new life praxis from a basis in art."[31]

The consequences of equating the avant-garde with the new praxis of life are far reaching. We could say that the first set of consequences belong to the moral register. Instantly, we can notice how the detachment of bourgeois art from the praxis of life implies the construction of the image of a fictional order that is "better" and freer than the prevailing one. By the same analogy, we can notice how the avant-gardists' construction of a new life praxis may be seen as distinct and freer from the "bad" life praxis of the existing society. The second set of consequences belongs to the register of economy. When "the cultural industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life,"[32] the avant-garde quest for the new life praxis, for the absolute beginning, became an instrument for the production of capital, thus obtaining the economic function. Once the radical negation of art in the existing praxis of life, the radical negation of the category of individual creation, and the elimination of the limits between producers and recipients, that is between art and audience, are accepted as works of art under the moral and economic principles advocated by liberalism, any vanguard movement loses its critical potential. This is to say that once a massed-produced object, such as a urinal, is signed and placed in a museum, provocation and critical gesture disappear every time such a gesture is repeated.

The failure of the avant-garde to repoliticize society may be seen precisely as a consequence of its claim on an absolute beginning. As we have observed above, the consequence was the fall of the avant-garde into the moral and economic registers. By claiming an absolute beginning, the avant-garde argued a total break with the dominant representational system and, thus,

opposed the existing politics and institutions of art. This allowed the avant-garde to disrupt the realm of art determined by the rise of bourgeois society and to develop in parallel to it. However, the opposition and parallelism of the avant-garde to bourgeois art and the existing life praxis, precluded the avant-garde from the possibility of engaging with the existing praxis and norms of representation, and, hence, to challenge and rearticulate them. More importantly, the operation of opposition—as the logical necessity of opposites prescribes—allowed for the absorption of the avant-garde's demands for absolute beginning to the modern and postmodern teleology of consolidation under historical evolution and the hegemony of capital. The consequence was the blurring of frontiers between bourgeois art and the avant-garde. This is how the avant-garde and any later vanguard movements allowed the modern and postmodern teleologies to spatialize their contesting political potential, by transforming the paradoxical nature of dialectical relations between them into the relations of contradiction and opposition, that, at the end, presupposed homogeneity and consensus in art. In fact, this is how modernity abstracted and deprived vanguard art from the possibility of intervening within existing norms of representation, and thus to articulate different ones.

It is then precisely by means of a transition from the disciplinary strictures of traditional art and modern aggregation of rationally organized genres deprived from the political character, to the avant-garde and later vanguard movements—which renewed a demand for politicization and art criticism—that the artistic creativity in the twentieth century was witnessing a transition from a disciplinary society to a society of control, from Fordism to post-Fordism, or from modernism to postmodernism, in which the realm of art and its demands for social change have been manipulated by capitalism—by capitalist's techniques of production and domination—so that they became its "common sense." By these means, liberalism deprived vanguard art from its inherently contesting political potential, and strengthened its own hegemonic power to

create, what we call today, the post-political condition. That being said, new strategies are necessary so that the dominant politics and forms of representations may be challenged.

The Articulation of Mise-en-sense into Mise-en-scène and Marlene Monteiro Freitas' Choreography

Despite the failure of the vanguard movements in art to rearticulate the norms of representation that comply with the demands of capital, the political dimension of art did not disappear. To perceive the political dimension of art it is necessary to abandon the artistic insistence on an absolute beginning, which opposes the existing institution of art and, therefore, entails artistic politics of disruption and withdrawal. As demonstrated above, the insistence on an absolute beginning precludes art from the possibility of intervening within the established norms of representation and, thus, separates art from its inherently relational, contesting, and constitutive political dimension. What is hence necessary is precisely the engagement with the existing institutions of art and representations established at the level of the symbolic. The operation of engagement provides art with the possibility not only of continuously challenging or contesting meanings sedimented in techniques, materials, or forms. More importantly, it enables art to rearticulate and constitute them in alternative ways. Accordingly, the artistic strategies of engagement support Rancière's assertion that art is a partaking of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*). Yet, they enable us to envisage how "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it," by means of the distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity,33 is engendered and put into form, into mise-en-forme. Philosopher Bernard Flynn wrote that social practices, including art practice,

"are recognisable as such only because they mean something within the general context of meaning, otherwise they would be simply physical motions."[34] Flynn's view implies that the pluralism of facts of sense perception, distributed by ways of disrupting "the clear partition of identities, activities and spaces," has to be structured into—what Claude Lefort calls—mise-en-scène that concerns the symbolic ordering of social relations. Drawing upon Lefort, Flynn emphasized that the mise-en-scène of social relations "means that society gives itself 'a quasi-representation of itself.'"[35] This implies that a disorder initiated by mise-en-sense, which contests the hierarchies of representation, has to be nevertheless articulated at the particular moment into an order of representation, into mise-en-scène.

The distinction between the mise-en-sense and the mise-en-scène draws a clear difference between Rancière's and Mouffe's projects of democracy and the disparate consequences that they have on envisaging the relationship between art and politics. As I demonstrated above, while anarchism stands for the artistic strategies of disruption conveyed by *le partage du sensible*, agonism stands for the artistic strategies of engagement that articulate initial mise-en-sense into mise-en-scène. And, as long as the former implies a disorder of the plurality of egalitarian positions, the later advocates an order of the plurality of positions instituted through hegemonic relations that are constructed through symbolization; by extension, a hegemonic order always already anticipates a disorder; or, to put it differently, the mise-en-scène anticipates the mise-en-sense.

The Lisbon-based Cape Verdean choreographer Marlene Monteiro Freitas observes society as constructed at the point of intersection of disorder and order in *Bacantes—Prelúdio Para Uma Purga* (Bacchae—Prelude to a Purge), a performance that premiered in 2017. As the reference to Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchantes* (405 bc) from the title indicates, this performance is

concerned with the disparate natures that construct people.37 In Euripides' *The Bacchantes*, Dionysus, the son of Zeus and mortal mother Semele, claims his divine nature whilst the royal house of Cadmus, to whom his mother belongs, denies it. In revenge, and in order to prove his divine origin, Dionysus holds rites in a mountain consisting of songs, dance and intoxication. The Dionysian rites draw women wild, including the three sisters of his mother who also denied that Semele got pregnant with Zeus. After Dionysus forced Pentheus, the King of Thebes, to climb the mountain, Agave, Semele's sister and Pentheus' mother, kills Pentheus in her madness, taking him for a lion. Within this context, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, back in 1872, observed that the Dionysian ideals stand for the spirit of chaos, music, dance, collectivity, and formlessness, in contrast to the Apollonian ideals that stand for the structural principle, architecture, sculpture, individuality and form-giving.38 Indeed, the entire Euripides' *The Bacchantes* is engaged with the place of irrationality designated by the Dionysian principles within a society rationally ordered by the Apollonian principles.

Nevertheless, the narrative of Euripides' *The Bacchantes* is not evident in Freitas's *Bacantes—Prelúdio Para Uma Purga*. Rather, through the rhythmical sequences of images, objects, movements and gestures, twelve dancers and musicians create situations that reflect on the conflictual natures of the Apollonian and Dionysian principles, of reason and irrationality, form and formlessness, and individuation and collectivity.39 The tension that brings rhythmic uncertainty to Bacantes is the reason why Freitas prefers to speak about her performances in a term of fiction.40 It is probably this that prompted performance critic Rita Natálio to write that Freitas' Bacantes "is firmly engaged with a fragmented consciousness and [that] it proposes a flow of associative freedom that postpones the rationality of interpretation;"41 and, accordingly, to suggest that "[t]he history of tragedy is thus paradoxically convoked and dissolved."42 Natálio's view on Freita's performance inclines us to conclude that the history

of Bacchantes is constructed as a drama unfolding on the verges of tragedy and comedy, and consciousness and unconsciousness, within the non-linear structure of the performance.

The mise-en-scène of the performance is a bright white cube, with a wide yellow strip of paint covering the floor by width. Within, a few stools and music stands are arranged. The black and white male and female bodies of the performers are "masked" with a heavy makeup that emphasizes their eyes, and especially their lips. They are dressed in costumes reminiscent of uniforms. And whereas the dancers are wearing white costumes, the musicians are dressed in blue and black ones. The brightness of the space, heavy makeup, primary colors of the costumes, shiny swim caps and flashy gloves in Freitas' staging of Bacantes, are suggestive of the *commedia dell'arte*, or, even more, of the cabaret. The music performed by five trumpeters (sometimes transformed into hybrid instruments by use of plungers or hoses) and one drummer gives rhythm to the movements. The movements are mechanical and evocative of slapstick; sometimes performers move like robots or dolls; sometimes they engage in Charlie Chaplin-like walks. However, what at one moment may appear as an organized order of images, movements, gestures, and attitudes, in another moment turns into a disorder in which every threat between the performance's parts gets lost. It is within such a structural system of alternating sketches of orderly and disorderly, and absurdly and logically organized situations, that a synchronized movement of performers executing the same gesture—that, for example, simulates writing on a typewriting machines, walking without ever touching the ground (while the performers are seated on stools), or, that unites the bodies of musicians in swinging—at a certain moment turns into a set of oblique gestures and actions that dissolve the initial orderly choreography into a seemingly uncontrolled set of moves and fantasies; however, only to again return to organized choreography. And just as the choreographic order of mechanical movements sometimes dissolves into formless moves, the melodies of Erik Satie's *Gnossienne*

No. 1 (1890), and the entire fifteen minutes of Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* (1928)—performed by trumpeters live on stage—at a particular moment dissolve or disarticulate into unknown scores.43 Freitas' performance embodies a constant play between the Dionysian and Apollonian ideals, between formless and form-giving, disorder and order, and individual principles and collective demands. *Bacantes—Prelúdio Para Uma Purga* points at the need for questioning the order of symbolized images, movements, gestures and attitudes, through the mutual engagement of the paradoxical, counter-positions, and the need for constituting their relationship in alternative ways.

This insight into Freitas' performance allows us to envisage what renders the political dimension of art. Firstly, we understand that it is necessary to abandon the idea of opposing the existing institutions of art, the idea that the historical avant-garde claimed and that the vanguard movements have reiterated. Secondly, it is necessary to recognize that our reality is discursively constructed, understanding discourse not as a mere representation of the social that encompasses only practices of speaking, writing and communicating, but as the practice of symbolization through language and actions within which objects and subjects are constructed. The first suggests a need to give up a claim to an absolute beginning that entails artistic politics of rupture and withdrawal. The second indicates that art should be perceived by means of discourse analysis, which implies artistic strategies of engagement with the existing symbols and their rearticulation in alternative ways.44 At once, this is a moment of their constitution in, what Flynn calls, a quasi-representation. This view recognizes a constitutive relationship between differential situations, and the inherent process of articulation and sublimation of one position into another, of disorder into order, of that which is excluded from symbolization into symbolization, of the Dionysian ideals into the Apollonian ideals, of the individual into the

collective, or the initial affectivity into representation. Hence, not only is disorder possible, it is even necessary for an order to be established.43

Redrawing Limits between the Intelligible and Abject Bodies

My thesis is that there is no pure or total form of art. By virtue of performativity, art stabilizes and articulates a particular system of relations into a certain configuration that is manifested in representation. Borrowing Mouffe's vocabulary, I have suggested that each representation implies a hegemony of the symbolized or chosen on the one hand, and a possibility for that which is excluded from symbolization, and which has no entity on its own, to be articulated and sublimated into a counter-hegemony. This is so, because however individual the production of art may be, no action has been discovered to exist in isolation. As Dewey stressed, "the action of everything is along with the action of other things."45 To that effect, representation in art is always decisive, partial, and proximal; it is articulated and constrained in relation to what it excludes. It stands for a possible way of conceiving societies within which the matter—that is symbolized or named through art—exists in its proximity. Representation proposes an order of relations that is eternally traversed by disorder. When representation in art is envisaged in this way, then it points at a paradoxical, insuperable tension and conflict between different and counter-hegemonic discourses and, hence, properties of different associations that are concerned with the recognition of distinct demands. It is precisely the ontological dimension of conflict that renders contingent the paradoxical nature of discourses and every representation in art.

In performance, the paradoxical and conflictual relation between different social, political, or cultural discourses is reflected through the continuous performative tension between the intelligible and abject bodies. In *Bodies that Matter*, philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler suggested that bodies are constructed through discursive means and that they "only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory scheme."[46] In other words, "gender is constructed through relations of power."[47] On the one hand, the acknowledgement of the relations of power in the construction of gender precludes the view on the relationship between differently constructed bodies in terms of oscillation, as Erika Fischer-Lichte's performance theory suggests.[48] This is so, because oscillation erases all the limits established between differential bodies, between their contours and movements, just as it erases all the limits between subjects and objects, and audience and performers. On the other hand, what the acknowledgement of relations of power in the construction of gender enables us to recognize is that the relationship between differently constructed bodies is regulated by power and hegemonic laws. In this view, the body is always performative; it implies a reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names as the result of power relations and hegemony. Any attempt to erase, or rather repress the limits between differential bodies and forms of identification, as well as between subject and object, or audience and performers, is always threatened by the repressed, by the other. According to philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, every loss of distinction between subject and object evokes abjection. She writes that "the plane of abjection is that of subject/object relationship."[49] Abjection accordingly does not respect the established limits, positions, and rules, but dissembles them; it "disturbs identity, system, order."[50]

Given these points, we can observe how abjection disturbs all the limits of the body conceived as the intelligible body. Philosopher Michel Foucault designated the intelligible body as an

object of knowledge; knowledge which is regulated by means of power and discipline through different discourses.51 Drawing upon Kristeva's notion of abject and Foucault's definition of intelligible bodies, Butler then distinguishes intelligible bodies from abject bodies. Intelligible bodies stand for a domain of formed subjects, while abject bodies are those who are not yet subjects, "but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of subject."52 Accordingly, we could say that the intelligible body is a corporeal manifestation of a present way of being, of a possible way of being in the world, regulated by law. It understands itself in relation to the abject bodies that it encounters and that it excludes. For its part, the abject body is continuously concerned with the present ways of being in the world. It is possible to suggest that it understands itself through the conflictual relationship with the intelligible bodies. As such, it emphasizes the fragility of the law that circumscribes the intelligible body and the possibility of disarticulating it. In fact, as Butler observes, the abject body is a paradoxically different body, an excluded body, the limit to intelligibility.53 As such, it stands for a constitutive outside to the body which is constructed through different and hegemonic discourses. The abject body has an inclination to take up a relationship with the intelligible body and rupture it, "opening up possibilities for the bodies which have no intelligible place."54

As a result, we could suggest that body politics manifests at the point of intersection of intelligibility and abjection; it articulates their paradoxical relation by reconfiguring an ensemble of discourses, practices, and institutions, in a specific unity that however privileges certain types of bodies while it excludes others. In this context, corporeality is not any more a matter of a "metaphysics," a matter of the human body inhabited by the spirit, nor is it a matter of the abject body displaced by the intelligible body—or vice versa, as Rancière's theory may imply. For if bodies only appear, endure, and live within the productive constraints of a certain highly generated dynamic of power, as Butler suggests, then, corporeality reflects a concern

and conflict with the regulative norms that materialize the bodies through categories such as sex, gender, or race, aiming to articulate the ways of representing them in another way.55 In other words, corporeality points at the coercive techniques of domination that circumscribe bodies within particular identities and laws of intelligibility, and the need for contesting these identities and laws by means of engagement and struggle from the abject position. This approach enables a shift from the pre-established perspective on bodies in terms of class-, gender-, or race-based identities, towards the relational forms of identification.

In this context, corporeality is to be envisaged as a reflection on the performativity of the multiplicity of paradoxical and conflictual discourses, concerned with the norms of representation in choreography which contest or comply with the dominant regulatory body politics. Once this is recognized, it becomes apparent that corporeality manifests a decisive articulation of paradoxical bodily positions in an intelligible choreography of the bodies. For if choreography is constituted by corporeality, it should then be recognized that the performing body does not simply unfolds its potential of being. In fact, the body is always implicated in the system that entangles it; it represents itself in relation to the bodies that it encounters and the bodies that it excludes. Choreography, thus, acknowledges that the indispensable phase of exclusion opens up a possibility for choice. It becomes a matter of a decisional act that draws limits towards certain bodies and circumscribes other by a particular discourse and context. To choose one, is to exclude another being; it is to confine intelligibility and propose a name. For that matter, the indispensable phase of exclusion of bodies demands, as choreographer Daniel Linehan suggests, a need to challenge the intelligible body embedded within the dominant system from the aporetic outside albeit acting within it.56

Drawing upon Freud and Lacan, psychoanalyst Nestor Braunstein argues that it is only a psychotic who has no choice, who does not choose.57 Following Braunstein's thought, choreography becomes a matter of decision; it may either assist or contest the current distinction between the intelligible and abject bodies. The intelligible body is, hence, always a matter of contingency; an effect of a partial stabilization, of a regulatory hegemony of discourses incited by particular social, political, or cultural demands that may always be challenged from the abject position, from the outside. To that effect, sex, gender, or race, are to be envisaged as categories that represent hegemonic corporeal systems of symbols and names to be continuously challenged and contested. It is then only by the possibility of a counter-hegemonic collective decision that the struggle between order of identities may be contested by disorder, or the Apollonian ideals by the Dionysian ideals. By means of struggle we may undo and redo the dominant neoliberal condition of indistinctness that is established through a particular order and that we call the post-political and open up possibilities for articulating alternative orderly societies. Performance practices and theories may play important roles in these processes.

[1] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993), *xi*.

[2] *Ibid*., *x*.

[3] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London, New York: Continuum [2000] 2006), 26—27.

[4] Bram Ieven, "Heteroreductives – Rancière's disagreement with ontology," *Parallax*, Vol. 15, no. 3 (2009), 60.

[5] Rancière, *The Politics*, 50.

[6] Jacques Rancière, "Democracy, Anarchism and Radical Politics Today: An Interview with Jacques Rancière," interview by Todd May, Benjamin Noys and Saul Newman, *Anarchist Studies*, Vol. 16, (July 1, 2008): 173—185.

[7] Jacques Rancière, "Introducing Disagreement," *Angelaki*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2004): 7.

[8] *Ibid*., 5.

[9] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis, London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 28.

[10] Jodi Dean, "Politics without Politics," *Parallax*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2009), 24.

[11] *Ibid*., 34.

[12] Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London, Verso: 2005), 121—122.

[13] The protest movements, such as *Indignados* in Spain, the international Occupy, or *Nuit debout* in France, which claimed no leadership and no representatives, are good examples of such a practice. Without dismissing their importance, we have to acknowledge that they faded away.

[14] Rancière, *Introducing Disagreement*, 7.

[15] Paulina Tambakaki, "When Does Politics Happen?," in *Parallax*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2009): 102—113.

[16] *Ibid*., 109.

[17] Writing about arbitrariness, Antonio Gramsci noted: "Any arbitrary constructions are pretty rapidly eliminated by historical competition, even if sometimes, through a combination of immediately favourable circumstances, they manage to enjoy popularity of a kind." In: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 341.

[18] Chantal Mouffe, "Which Public Space for Critical Artistic Practices," in *Cork Caucus: On Art, Possibility and Democracy*, eds. Shep Steiner and Trevor Joyce (Cork, Frankfurt: National Sculpture Factory/Revolver, 2006), 153.

[19] Mouffe, *On the Political,* London and New York: Routledge*, 2005*, 9.

[20] Mouffe, "Which Public Space," 165.

[21] John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (Chicago: Sage Books, [1927] 1954), 33.

[22] *Ibid*., 27.

[23] *Ibid*., 26.

[24] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics* (London: Verso, 2013), 7.

[25] Dewey, *The Public*, 32.

[26] The moment of unity is given on the nominal, not on the conceptual level. Every name is thus contingent construction.

[27] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1984] 2004), 49.

[28] *Ibid*., 47.

[29] *Ibid*., 49.

[30] *Ibid*.,

[31] *Ibid*.,

[32] *Ibid*., 50.

[33] Rancière, *The Politics*, 12.

[34] Bernard Flynn, *The Philosophy of Claude Lefort: Interpreting the Political* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 112.

[35] *Ibid*.,

[36] Marlene Monteiro Freitas' performance *Bacantes - Prelúdio Para Uma Purga* premiered at The National theatre D. Maria II in Lisabon, in April 2017.

[37] The Bacchaee or the Bacchantes is Euripides' tragedy written in 410 B. C. E. The entire tragedy is concerned with the view on society at the verge of rational and irrational principles. See: Euripides. *The Bacchantes*. The

Internet Classics Archive by Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics. Accessed on September 26, 2017. http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/bacchan.html

[38] Friederich Nietzche, *The Birth of Tragedy, trans*. Ian C. Johnston (Blackmask, 2003), accessed June 12, 2017, http://www.russoeconomics.altervista.org/Nietzsche.pdf.

[39] Freitas describes her performances in terms of situations, rather than in terms of stories and narrations., in order to overcome abstraction and expression in performance. See: Marlene Monteiro Freitas, *The Meaning of Fictions*, Interview by Jean-Marc Adolphe, Kunstenfetivaldesarts programme (Brussels: Kunstenfestivaldesarts, 5—27 May, 2017), 20.

[40] A moral side of "making room" in performance and giving rhythm to it, prompted Freitas to speak about her performances in terms of fictions. In: *Ibid*.,

[41] Rita Natálio, "The Spiralled Dualism of Marlene Monteiro Freitas", written in May 2017, Departures and Arrivals, accessed October 3, 2017, http://departuresandarrivals.eu/en/texts/texts-and-reviews/the-spiraled-dualism-of-marlene-monteiro-freitas-625.

[42] *Ibid*.,

[43] When one takes into consideration that *Gnossienne* was composed at the time of the archeological excavations of the city of Knossos, on the Greek island of Crete, and, hence, the most common explanation that the title of Satie's piece refers to the ritual dances performed by the inhabitants of Knossos, famous in Greek mythology for the story of its labyrinth, Theseus and the minotaur, and that *Boléro* was composed as a ballet out of an interest for the reinvention of dance movements, then these compositions indeed become in Freita's performance the symbols of the constitutive and paradoxical natures of the Dionysian and the Apollonian ideals, of formless and form-giving, disorder and order, individual principles and collective demands.

[44] On discourse analysis and art, see my text: Goran Petrovic Lotina, "The Political Dimension of Dance: Mouffe's Theory of Agonism and Choreography," in *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance and Radical Democracy,* eds. Tony Fisher & Eva Katsouraki, 46-66 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[45] Dewey, *The Public*, 22.

[46] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, xi.

[47] *Ibid*., *x*.

[48] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008).

[49] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 64.

[50] *Ibid*., 4.

[51] Foucault, Michael, "The Body and Power," interview by the editorial collective of Quel Corps? (1975), trans. Colin Gordon, accessed June 8, 2017, http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpfoucault6.htm.

[52] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

[53] *Ibid*., *xi*.

[54] Butler also writes about dispossessed bodies as abject bodies. A dispossessed body is the body deprived of a belonging to the world in a broader sense; in fact, it has been stripped from the land, citizenship or property, and, as such, it is inclined for a social and political action. In: Athena Athanasio and Judith Butler, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 59.

[55] Borrowing Heidegger's vocabulary, conflict becomes an essence, something that 'presences' itself, and sets itself forth from out of itself; it is yet to happen. See: Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1949] 1977), 160.

[56] Daniel Linehan, *A No One Can Make Space* (MER: Paper Kunsthalle, 2013), book VI.

[57] Nestor Braunstein,"You Cannot Choose To Get Crazy", in *Lacan on Madness: Yes, You Can't,* eds. Patricia Gherovitci and Manya Steinkoler (London: Routledge, 2015), 85—98.

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